

★ news release

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# INTERIOR URGES LAW TO BOOST WILDLIFE REFUGE REVENUES TO COUNTIES

Appearing before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall said the proposed legislation would aid acquisition of areas for wildlife, particularly wetlands for waterfowl, because it would assure more equitable distribution of revenues among counties when such lands are withdrawn from tax rolls.

Revenues to counties come from sales of timber, grass, hay, and other products harvested on such refuges. Some counties receive little or no money from such sources; other counties receive more revenue than had the land remained in private ownership.

A new formula, supported by Secretary Udall and assured in the suggested legislation, would put all refuge income into a single fund for distribution under a formula tied to local real estate values.

The new legislation, Secretary Udall said, is necessary to correct the present "outmoded, inequitable system of sharing revenues with the county governments."

Secretary Udall noted that the Nation's wetlands development plan received a major boost in 1961 when Congress authorized a \$105-million advance on the Federal duck stamp fund for a seven-year accelerated program. The money will be repaid from future sales of duck stamps.

The program which Congress authorized, however, has been held up in the vitally important nesting areas of the Dakotas and Minnesota by local opposition to Federal land purchases which take property off local tax rolls.

Secretary Udall said that under the new proposal--with payments tied to local land values--money to the counties would nearly equal what the counties would have received if the lands were in private ownership. A few counties could receive less than they now get, but most counties would receive more.

"In 1963, North Dakota counties received \$12,193 under the 1935 law," Secretary Udall said. "If our proposal had been law, North Dakota would have received about \$62,000. In 1963, the South Dakota counties where we have refuge holdings received \$5,723; if our proposal had been law, they would have received about \$18,600."

The 1961 law for accelerated wetlands development requires that the purchase of lands for waterfowl habitat must first be approved by the respective governors or State agency. Secretary Udall said \$17 million has been appropriated during the first three years of the program, and some \$11.5 million in duck stamp receipts have also been used to acquire lands where local approvals have been obtained.

Under a 1935 law, 25 percent of the net receipts from wildlife refuge lands (timber, minerals, oil, grass, and so forth) is paid each year to the counties where the refuges are located. The money benefits public schools and roads. The new formula would continue to require use of the fund for the benefit of public schools and roads.

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